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ABSTRACT

The Child Development Training Consortium, a Beacon College Project directed by San Juan College (SJC) is a collaborative effort of colleges and universities in New Mexico and Arizona. The consortium's major objective is to create child development training materials for community college faculty who teach "at-risk" Native American and Hispanic students enrolled in early childhood education programs. The program's conceptual framework is guided by aspects of self-directed learning, story telling, media communications, and quality management. Founded on the premise that Native American and Hispanic people make their own local preschools work, the program facilitates community efforts by providing training and technical assistance. Consortium members are engaged in the following activities: (1) the University of New Mexico (UNM), Los Alamos, is producing a photo essay showing their Nanny Program graduates at work; (2) Northland Pioneer College (Arizona) is producing a video of a Native American man who works as a Child Development Associate advisor in the Navajo Nation; (3) Santa Fe Community College (New Mexico) is documenting a preschool education training program which develops high literacy skills; (4) Luna Vocational Technical Institute (New Mexico) is producing a video about their literacy program which employs art activities; (5) UNM-Gallup is documenting its curriculum for Native American preschool teachers emphasizing basic skills in math and English; (6) SJC is developing materials on approaches to collaborative learning in multicultural classrooms; and (7) Northern New Mexico Community College and UNM-Valencia are establishing early childhood programs which will experiment with materials developed by the consortium. (MAB)

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The Child Development Training Consortium

A Status Report on the San Juan College AACJC-Kellogg Beacon College Project

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How can community colleges promote effective learning on the part of "at risk" adult students in early childhood education programs? How can the practical lessons of everyday experience with young children and their families be shared, expanded, and applied to the quality improvement of the early childhood profession? How can we strengthen our capacity to respond to the needs of low income, rural families with young children? These are the challenges that the Child Development Training Consortium is working to answer.

This Beacon Project, sponsored and directed by San Juan College, is a cooperative and collaborative effort among associate colleges in New Mexico and Arizona that serve rural, poor, culturally diverse regions. The major objective of our consortium is to create child development training materials that can be used effectively by community college faculty to teach "at risk" Native American and Hispanic students enrolled in early childhood education programs.

Each associate college in our consortium has been invited to contribute local documentation materials that reflect its own strengths and expertise as an early childhood training institution. The project provides production support, including professional technical assistance in video, still photography, writing, graphic design, and reproduction. C. David Beers is project director. Richard W. Ott, a communications specialist, is providing technical assistance.

The Child Development Training Consortium is using an innovative process developed at San Juan College that combines

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aspects of several diverse systems for communicating complex knowledge. Our conceptual framework is guided by some of the fundamental principles of self-directed learning, story telling, media communications, and quality management. The process is applied both internally and externally; it guides the way we work cooperatively as a group, and influences the objectives and design of the training materials that we are producing.

Self-directed Learning and Storytelling

Most of the members of the Child Development Training Consortium are community college instructors; as such, we are specialists in how adults learn. However, our teaching field is early childhood education, so we specialize as well in how children learn. We acknowledge that direct instruction using lectures and text is one part of the tool kit for communicating baseline information to adult learners. However, working with young children has taught us that how we teach is as important as what we teach. For this reason, an important aim of our consortium is to explore the use of self-directed learning and storytelling as additional tools for sharing complex knowledge among adults. These tools have a proven track record in helping children to learn, and we are endeavoring to see how they can be adapted for use by community college teachers in helping adults to learn.

The adult students we work with as community college instructors live, for the most part, in poor, rural Native American and Hispanic villages. They are people who choose to live, work and raise their children in remote, traditional communities that are hard to reach, not just because of their geographic isolation, but also because of their cultural differences from mainstream American life.

Encouraging self-sufficiency in young children is a primary goal of any good preschool program. Similarly, a primary goal of our approach to adult learning is to encourage the development of self-sufficiency among adults who work in geographically isolated, culturally different preschool programs. We operate from the premise that what is needed most in these communities is a consistent, mutually respectful relationship with professional colleagues from the outside, such as community college faculty, who can extend and expand the local base of expertise while respecting the child-rearing traditions that are important to the local way of life.

In short, our basic premise is that Native Americans and Hispanic people themselves make their own local preschool programs work. Our purpose is to facilitate their efforts by providing them with certain kinds of training and technical assistance. We also understand that our students themselves must be able to apply the information we provide, adapt it to their own needs, and make it work in their own setting; only then will we have completed our total job as trainers.

An important part of our approach, therefore, is to ask our adult learners to put themselves into a frame of mind in which they observe themselves at work and reflect on what they observe. We ask them to document — in oral conversations, journal writing, and portfolios — the knowledge they construct for themselves out of their own experiences. By documenting this self-reflection process, the adult learner becomes the author of her own stories.

As a person builds confidence in her own stories and in her skills as a storyteller, she is more able to learn from the stories of others. This two-way process is a well-

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known component of effective learning, and, applied to adults, opens the door for people who come from culturally different traditions to view learning as a process of sharing stories: if I can learn from my stories, I can learn from your stories. As the poet Adrienne Rich said, "The world is made of stories, not atoms."

Our confidence in adapting storytelling and self-directed learning processes for adult education led us to consider a larger context for applying principles of early childhood education to adult learners. In broadening our perspective, we discovered a remarkable connection between early childhood education and a profound transformation that is currently changing the way American companies are managed.

The Business of Education

Adults in community college programs are students by choice. In this sense, they are our customers; they seek knowledge and skills, a service which we are in the business of supplying. Viewing adult learning from this perspective allowed us to see beyond the usual boundaries of community college and early childhood and education. If, in a fundamental sense, education is a business process, can we learn anything useful by looking at the practices and principles of business? Answering this question has both surprised and encouraged us.

In recent years, as one American industry after another declined in the face of increasing competition by Japanese and other foreign industries, many businesses in our country began to examine their ways of doing business, looking for new approaches to improving the quality of their products and services. As a result of this self-reflective process, the widespread use of merit systems and management by objectives, once heralded as the surest means of achieving success in business, is being seriously challenged.

Top-down, reward and punishment philosophies of management are now viewed, by at least some business experts, as the single most destructive force in business management today (Aguayo, 1991). This has been a difficult lesson for American companies, made even harder by the fact that it was learned by Japanese industries as early as the 1950's and by the realization that it became the catalyst for that country's phenomenal economic success. It was a lesson taught to them by an American, Dr. W. Edwards Deming, a quality control expert who is now widely recognized, even in this country, for his breakthrough insights on how organizational structures and management processes influence the quality of businesses' products and services.

American companies have begun to implement the Deming model for quality management with unprecedented speed. A recent study by the American Society of Training and Development found that more than half of the businesses surveyed have established quality management as a strategic goal, and that virtually all of the other businesses surveyed anticipate implementing quality management within three years. Why have American businesses so eagerly accepted this new approach to management? Because, simply, it works. And it works for reasons that early childhood educators have long understood.

As educators looking at the field of business for new ideas to improve our teaching process, we have been surprised to discover that the conceptual framework of quality management shares some basic principles of early childhood education. These similarities are particularly clear with regard to showing respect for in-

dividuals within the system, tapping intrinsic motivation by supporting the autonomy of individuals, and by considering the quality of products and services from the point of view of the user.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore in-depth the implications of quality management as it applies to adult learners in community college programs. Our consortium, in fact, is still investigating this new perspective on our task of training materials development. However, we are encouraged to pursue this line of investigation because of the support it provides for our aim of adapting early childhood education practices to adult learners.

Early childhood educators know that a teacher's attitude toward students can influence the learning process — for better or worse. Trust and respect are fundamental for working successfully with young children. Members of our consortium hold the view that a similar attitude of respect is also necessary for working with adult learners, as discussed above. Likewise, companies pursuing quality management also respect the importance of individuals in their workforce. In a business, respect for individuals translates into recognition that the people who have the greatest familiarity and are most knowledgeable of the actual workings of its systems and processes are in a position to make important suggestions for improvement that no one else can make. Because of his own direct experience, a worker on an assembly line knows better than anyone how his job can be made easier and more productive. We see,

here, support for our premise that effective training for adults who work in preschools — particularly in culturally different settings — must encouraged the development of competency by building on a foundation of direct experience.

Just as motivation of students is important to teachers, motivation of workers is important to business managers. The Deming model approaches motivation, first and foremost, by eliminating the use of production quotas, merit plans and annual performance reviews — methods which rely, fundamentally, on fear. Instead, quality management recognizes and fosters intrinsic motivation as the primary engine for improving quality; people do a good job because of pride in their work, a sense of professionalism, love for their work, self-respect, and so on (Aguayo, 1990). Encouraging young children's intrinsic motivation to learn by supporting their autonomy and self-esteem is a fundamental goal of any successful preschool. As teachers of young children we are delighted to learn that this fundamental principle of early childhood education is now being used in the mainstream of our society as a tool for improving the quality of our workplaces, and, indeed, our lives.

If trust, autonomy, and respect for individuals support the intrinsic motivation of preschool children as well as that of workers in our industries, we are certainly encouraged to expect that this practice will prove to be successful in training adult students in our community college early childhood programs. We are, therefore, endeavoring to develop training materials for adult learners that tap their intrinsic motivation by supporting their autonomy and by encouraging their pride and commitment in the early childhood profession.

We have identified at least one other noteworthy example of an early childhood education principle that is reflected in the processes of quality management. Quality-conscious companies seek feedback from their customers in the design of their products or the packaging of their services.

By including customers in the business process, quality management introduces the idea of continually refining the process so as to constantly increase customer satisfaction. We see this approach as being largely consistent with the practice in early childhood education of continually observing children's responses to their learning environment, and of providing them with developmentally appropriate activities. A product or service that genuinely satisfies a consumer's need is not unlike an activity or a learning center that is genuinely appropriate to a young child's stage of development. Just as quality improvement in business is a continual process, so is the teaching of young children. Here, once again, we are encouraged to boldly pursue our aim of adapting the tools of early childhood education for adult learners.

Our effort to understand this new paradigm of quality management, and to discover how we can use it to advantage in our work as teacher trainers, is continuing. At first glance, it may seem to some of our colleagues in education that we are wandering far afield from early childhood and community college education. But, as briefly discussed above, we have already recognized enough similarities between these disciplines to be encouraged toward further work along this line of inquiry. At the very least, we see our effort, even though it is focused on the task of developing training materials for adult learners, as one small part in the quality improvement of the business of American education. We hope, as part of our final report for this Beacon College Project, to discuss our findings in more depth.

Training Materials as Representations of Experience

Our conceptual approach to developing training materials for adult learners reflects, in important respects, a constructivist framework. Complex knowledge must be constructed by the knower; it cannot be taught directly. Learning, therefore, takes place through representation of experience. (Jones, et al, 1991). We believe this is true for both adults and children, and our goal is to develop training materials for adults that represent experiences in working with young children.

Members of our consortium are now actively engaged in producing materials that reflect their particular expertise and experience in early childhood teacher training. Most of these materials have a strong emphasis on autobiography, storytelling, or self-reflection on the part of early childhood teachers and teacher trainers. Our aim is to create materials that represent experience that can be shared with adult learners in the field of early childhood education, both novices and working professionals seeking to extend their competence and skills.

Projects now planned, or underway, include the production of video tapes, photo essays, audio recordings, and printed materials. Our consortium includes a communications specialist who is helping to facilitate the production of these materials by providing members with technical assistance.

Summary of Work to Date

Seven community colleges, in addition to San Juan College, were included in our initial grant proposal: Northland Pioneer College, Luna Vocational Technical Institute, Santa Fe Community College, UNM-Los Alamos, UNM-Gallup, UNM-Valencia, and Northern New Mexico Community College. Interest in our

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consortium was strong from the beginning, and as news of the project spread through the early childhood education community in the region, we attracted the active participation of New Mexico State University and Western New Mexico University. In addition, two state-wide agencies — the New Mexico Office of Child Development and the private, non-profit Coalition for Children, Youth, and Families — joined the consortium, and are helping to widen the context of our work.

The consortium first met in December, 1991 at a two-day working conference which asked the guiding question: What can we do, as community college faculty, to promote effective learning on the part of adult students in our early childhood training programs? Participants attending the conference began to approach this question by sharing stories of their individual professional experiences in early childhood education. Examples of successful strategies and approaches for adult training were discussed and compared. The strengths and benefits of our group collaboration were identified, as well as the weaknesses and risks we face.

By the close of the first conference, consortium participants had articulated clear objectives for the project that describe our vision of success and our group commitment. Our aim is:

- to produce practical, high quality training materials for adult learners;
- to build on our strengths and experiences as individuals and as a group;
- to show respect for learners and for teachers in our work and in the materials we produce;
- to celebrate, in our process and in our products, the joy and commitment we feel toward the education of young children.

The conference concluded with a round of brainstorming as participants began to articulate ideas and plans for individual projects and actions.

In March, 1992, consortium members met for a second workshop which was organized around the guiding questions: What are we going to do? and How are we going to do it? At this meeting we began to evaluate proposed materials development projects in terms of content, intended audience, and style. The practical considerations of production, packaging and distribution were discussed and individual members described their works in progress. By this time, consortium associates had committed to the following projects:

- UNM-Los Alamos is producing a black and white photo essay showing graduates of their Nanny Program at work with families. The essay will tell the story of four students and their personal growth.
- Northland Pioneer College is producing a video about a Native American man who works as a CDA advisor in remote regions of the Navajo Nation in Arizona. On-camera interviews will trace his career path from Head Start bus driver, to Head Start teacher, and on to teacher trainer.
- Santa Fe Community College is documenting its process of encouraging adult learners to develop high literacy skills as they construct for themselves expertise as preschool educators.
- Luna Vocational Technical Institute is producing video tapes that show the link between literacy and hands on art activity, and how the expressive and creative arts can be used successfully as teaching tools.
- UNM-Gallup is documenting a curriculum for Native American preschool teachers that emphasizes an explicit process for addressing basic skills in math and English.

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• San Juan College, in addition to serving as project sponsor, is developing materials that reflect its experience with approaches to collaborative learning in multi-cultural classrooms.

Northern New Mexico Community College and UNM-Valencia are both establishing new early childhood programs in 1991-1992. These consortium associates have elected to serve as "reality testers" for the materials we are developing and will provide "consumer" feedback as we finalize our products.

Now, at the mid-point of our Beacon Project, individual projects are at various stages of development. Other ideas continue to emerge and may be included in our "tool kit" of training materials as we begin to finalize our work. Fall, 1992, activities will include another workshop for consortium members, plus field visits to selected associate colleges to provide technical assistance on site and to facilitate final production of materials. There is great enthusiasm among the members of our consortium both for the collaborative process we have invented for ourselves, and for the high quality products that we see growing out of our work together.

Outlook for the Future

Response to our collaborative group process has been positive not only among consortium associates, but among the wider early childhood education community throughout our region as well. A spin-off project — a short video documenting and evaluating seven state-funded early childhood programs — has already been funded by the State of New Mexico Office of Child Development. Several other projects, also requiring funding beyond the Beacon College grant, are in the proposal stage. These include a proposed video documentary for the Indian Head Start Director's Association, and a project, in collaboration with Elizabeth Jones and Pacific Oaks College, for

training Native American early childhood teachers in the southwest. Apart from our materials development focus, we have seen growing interest at the state level in the benefits of our collaborative network of early childhood professionals. We expect that the momentum we have already achieved will continue, in some form, to influence the shape of the early childhood community in our region.

All of these potential projects spring from, and are based on, the conceptual framework that guides the Child Development Training Consortium in our collaborative process of developing practical, effective training materials for adult learners in early childhood education. We believe that all teaching is a collaborative process, and that the most effective ways for helping young children learn can be adapted to work also for adults. ■

SOURCES:
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